DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 987 CS 204 979

AUTHOR Hays, Janice
TITLE Teaching the Grammar of Discourse.
PUB DATE May 79
NOTE 30p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English (12th, Ottawa, Canada, May 8-11, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills; College Freshmen; *Connected Discourse; *Developmental Programs; *Discourse Analysis; Higher Education; Remedial Instruction; *Sentence Combining; Teaching Techniques; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Ways in which the study of discourse analysis can aid the teacher of basic writing in helping their students to express themselves fluently are explored in this paper. It is noted that remedial writers need to learn to relate abstract ideas to concrete examples and that they seem unable to supply the connections between ideas, especially those of a causal and purposive relationship. Discourse analysis is suggested as a means of providing writers with an understanding of relating assertions and developing them with the emphasis on the writing of better discourse, rather than on the learning of complicated models of analysis. A combination of sentence combining techniques and patterned practice is suggested to teach these relationships. (MKM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED174987

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

TEACHING THE GRAMMAR OF DISCOURSE

Janice Hays
Skidmore College

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Janice Hays

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS204979

Janice Hays
Skidmore College
Saratoga Springs
NY 12866

Teaching the Grammar of Discourse

In this paper, I am going to talk about working with college-age "developmental" students, the kind whom the late Mina Shaughnessy characterized as "basic writers," suggesting that they "write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes."[1] However, we need to remember that the basic writer's profile differs from setting to setting. The typical "basic writer" at a small, private four-year college is on a different rung of the developmental writing ladder than is the open-admissions student at an urban community college.

It is the first category of developmental students--I suppose we could call them suburban or "preppie" basic writers--that I have in mind as I write, students who do not commit blatant usage errors--except, perhaps, for grotesqueries of spelling--who by and large know their verb endings although they may have difficulty handling sequence of tenses, and who, unless they are EOP students, automatically write *she says*, not *she say*, although they may also write *every one of these books are boring*. Yet even though their usage errors are not gross ones, the students I am describing are beginning writers: their prose is, variously, so incoherent as to be unintelligible, so vague as to be meaningless, so simplistic as to be puerile, and they are enough like the basic writers whom Shaughnessy describes so that many of the principles that she elucidates apply to them even though specific details may not. In the same way, much of what I write in this paper will be generally true of all developmental stu-

dents although specific applications may well vary.

In teaching such students, the composition instructor seemingly must do everything all at once. Often described as being "concrete operational" or "field dependent," they need help in developing the cognitive skills required by academic discourse, particularly those skills involved in "ranging widely but in fairly predictable patterns between concrete and abstract statements, between cases and generalizations."[2] Without such ability, the student is unable to produce the kinds of writing that the academic situation demands. Yet as Janet Emig points out, a considerable body of research suggests that these very abilities are a product of and are learned through written language,[3] in part through reading but more especially in the act of writing; that is, it may be through writing itself that we develop the cognitive skills required to engage in literate discourse.[4] Thus basic writers are in a double bind: they cannot write in mature ways because they do not think in "mature" (that is, "formal operational") ways, and they do not think in these ways because, for whatever reasons, they have not done and do not do the writing required to develop them.

Basic writers also seem to lack ideas to write about. Although often they can talk at length and with fluency about a subject, their writing seems "thin," simplistic, lacking in the richness and nuance that suggests complexity of experience and thought. Thus they need help with invention, the generation of ideas for writing and, perhaps more essential, in writing. Yet even when they have developed a wealth of material--as, for example, they can learn to do through use of a systematic heuristic procedure--often they are unable to embody these ideas in writing, having difficulty arranging them logically and effectively and, probably even more fundamental, lacking

the syntactic abilities to articulate concepts in ways that do justice to their complexity. And, of course, basic writers are plagued by the high incidence of errors, whether blatant or merely troublesome, that at the least detracts from their writing and may even distort or obscure its meaning. Thus the developmental student needs help not only with the subject matter and forms of discourse but with language itself.

Although all these tasks are urgent, I suspect that in teaching basic writing, most teachers elect to spend substantial amounts of time on language competency, for it seems eminently apparent that without such competency, students will not only be unable to handle complex ideas but, if Emig is correct, will be unable even to think them. And because these students need to learn so many language conventions, they often must spend a great deal of time, both in class and laboratory work, on just these matters of language competency.[5] Yet many conscientious teachers will feel uneasy about this disposition of time, aware that the hour devoted to syntax and usage is an hour that will <u>not</u> by spent in writing extended discourse --and just as surely as our students need to write competent and correct sentences, they also need to produce effective academic writing if they are going to survive in college.

Yet recent work in both discourse theory and the developing of syntactic fluency and maturity suggests that time spent on language competency need not be time divorced from discourse, that we can teach basic writers--and perhaps many students whom we would not classify as developmental--grammar in ways that will also help them to acquire the strategies of discourse. It is to such a premise that I will address this paper, but before I discuss this idea fur-

ther, let me make it clear what I am not advocating. By "teaching grammar," I do not mean asking the student to memorize an elaborate descriptive system of the language's workings and then to apply that system to the identification and analysis of language patterns. Rather, I am advocating teaching students only as much information as they need to engage purposefully in the language manipulation and practice that will increase competency. The research on sentence combining certainly suggests that it is largely the manipulation of syntax that produces better writing.

Further, although I will be talking about the developing of syntactic fluency, I am not implying that the entire composition course be devoted to work with syntax. On the contrary, I believe that the composition course should be devoted to composition and that students should approach each segment of the writing process within the context of the total process, from its initial pre-writing to its terminal revising and editing stages. But I am suggesting that we can teach basic writers language skills in ways that will undergird their learning of the entire writing process. And I am suggesting something even more fundamental: that the cognitive operations involved in the skillful manipulation of syntax are the same as those involved in discourse itself--even as the thought processes called upon in invention may well be the same as those that comprise the strategies of discourse.[6]

In discussing syntax, Shaughnessy suggests that the inexperienced writer does not "have command of the language he needs to bring off the consolidations that are called for in writing" and that, further, in his sentences he "sees no seams nor joints nor points of intersection--only irrevocable wholes."[7] The studies of John C. Mellon and Frank O'Hare suggest that sentence-combining exercises can be

powerful tools for enabling young learners to develop syntactic maturity, and a recent study at Miami University of Ohio has confirmed the usefulness of this technique with college-age students.[8]

Yet sentence-combining exercises as they are generally constructed have certain limitations. As Robert de Beaugrande notes, they do not take into account "what motivations of writers and responses of readers are related to syntactic formation"--and without a strategy, a rationale, for certain kinds of syntactic operations, "syntactic maturity" becomes a means divorced from its end: the writer develops a powerful set of tools but does not know which ones to use for what jobs.

The most popular and accessible book of sentence-combining exercises at the college level is William Strong's Sentence Combining, and yet, as the Miami University study suggests, Strong's exercises do not encourage their practitioners to generate subordinate clauses,[10] nor do sentence-combining exercises in general encourage the establishing of relationships across or between T-units or sentences. Yet it seems essential that basic writers learn to perform such operations. Andrea Lunsford assesses the implications of an Ohio State University research project in which she worked with developmental students, concluding that "available sentence-combining or other exercises designed to foster syntactic growth must be carefully revised for remedial-writing students. Such revised exercises must (1) elicit student generation of sentences as well as combination of them and (2) foster skills in inference-drawing, abstracting, synthesizing, and conceptualizing."[11]

Along the same lines Shaughnessy, in the passage cited above, alludes to the basic writer's difficulties not only with syntactical consolidations but with the "seams," "joints," and "points of inter-

section" in sentences, and in another place she discusses the difficulty that basic writers have with the convention of academic discourse that engages the writer in "explicitly marking the logical and rhetorical relationships between sentences, paragraphs, and larger units of composition."[12] It is here, I believe, that concerns of syntax and discourse overlap and that we should teach the one even as we teach the other.

That is, in recent years a substantial body of theory has been concerned with the "grammar" of units of discourse, whether those units were sentences, paragraphs, or essays. Although there are, certainly, significant differences in the propositions advanced by such writers on the subject as Francis Christensen, Alton Becker, Paul Rodgers, David Karrfalt, Michael Grady, Willis Pitkin, and others, all of these theorists are, at least in part, concerned with the ways in which assertions are developed and related.

In calling for a new, "generative rhetoric of the sentence"--and later of the paragraph--Francis Christensen suggested that such a rhetoric would be built upon the principles of addition or modification, direction of movement, levels of generality, and texture.[15] Christensen's work, which has had an enormous influence on the thinking of composition theorists about both the sentence and larger units of discourse, can prove highly useful in the classroom.[14] In particular, his principles say a great deal about the ways in which ideas are developed--the procedures by which a writer says something and then says it again in a slightly different way, adding more information about it and giving concrete details about certain key aspects of that information. Further, Christensen suggests some relatively simple schemes by which teachers can help students with both syntactic and rhetorical development--in particular, with moving from gen-

eral to specific, one of the operations that, as Shaughnessy suggests, is especially difficult for basic writers: "The problem in most BW papers lies in the absence of movement between abstract and concrete statements . . . . If anything, students seem to have more difficulty moving from abstract statements down to more concrete levels than they do moving up the ladder of abstraction."[15]

Yet Christensen's model has its limitations. David Karrfalt has pointed out that Christensen's description of all discursive movement as either a coordinate or subordinate modification of the base unit --whether that unit is the basic clause of a sentence or the topic sentence of a paragraph--accounts for only one "direction of movement" and "principle of addition"--namely, the vertical.[16] Yet clearly at both the sentence and paragraph levels, discourse also moves in horizontal, or linear, ways. As Richard Larson notes, a writer must take a succession of directional steps in order to reach a goal, must, at some point, "lay words and sentences end to end."[17]

Willis Pitkin, Jr., a former student of Christensen's, asserts that discourse is a series of related operations whose units, which Pitkin terms "discourse blocs," are discoverable by function; that these units operate hierarchically, being added to or embedded within larger units that are in turn embedded within or added to still larger units; and that they may be related to each other either horizontally--by simple coordination or by "complementation" (as, for example, in the relationship between cause and effect, question and answer, negative and positive)--or vertically--either by subordination or "superordination" (as in the move from species to genus). In a subsequent article, Pitkin makes it clear that by "hierarchy" he means "levels of functional inclusiveness," not levels of semantic generality.[18]

Although Pitkin's system of discourse analysis is too complicated for use in the basic-writing classroom, some of the principles he enunciates have significant implications for teaching basic--and even not so basic--writers both syntactic manipulation and the operations of discourse. For one thing, Pitkin solves the problem pointed to by Karrfalt and Larson--that of a discourse model whose movement is vertical only. Although Pitkin insists that a true "linear rhetoric of the essay" is possible only in a coordinate series since "an apparent linear extension such as x and y so z always involves a hierarchical shift,"[19] nevertheless, he has suggested a model that does what Larson seems to be asking for: make possible a "dynamic principle of forward motion that moves the piece," a plan by which the writer will reach his or her conclusion.[20] Pitkin's model suggests that discourse moves both horizontally, or linearly, and vertically --suggests that in moving from here to there, from x to y, the writer may linger along the way to establish x or to develop some of the implications of here, but that the discourse nevertheless moves towards and will eventually reach there, or y.

Josephine Miles alludes to somewhat the same idea when she suggests that in considering the nature of discourse, we pay attention to purpose:

> Writing endeavors to provide situations for its statements; it wants to locate its predication in time, place, manner, consequence; it wants to provide a where, when, how, why, for its who does what . . . perhaps as minimally as by an -s-z signal of person in time: he plays . . . perhaps . . . as maximally as by a two-volume novel's contrasting episodes of boy meets girl: I. By accident, in the jungle;

II. On purpose, three years later in the dessert.

. . .

> The sentence may read: "Carefully he drove to town." . . . The paragraph . . . may begin with a number of sentences conveying the action of driving to town . . . . Even more fully, as the one sentence is derivable from two, so the one paragraph may be derivable from two, the first on care, the second on driving. So there may even be various sorts of care, with a paragraph to each.[21]

And so on; although Miles is here discussing the paragraph, the same principle extends, as she suggests, to discourse of any length. Larson recognizes the same possibility:

> Linear planning can make some contribution to a rhetoric of the whole essay. And if linear planning can help shape the direction taken by an essay toward its goal, while a hierarchical perspective indicates where one or more specific perceptions or some inclusive, generalizing statements are needed to round out the presentation of a point, then the two models of discourse can complement each other and contribute jointly to a new rhetoric of the whole essay.[22]

In suggesting these equations, I am probably oversimplifying Pitkins concepts, but this reduction has some useful implications for teaching students to write, for it suggests that if we can give them strategies and techniques for developing and relating their ideas, for moving "up and down and sideways," we are helping them to develop their discursive writing. That is, probably all writing teachers are familiar with the kind of student paper that lacks adequate vertical development, a paper that in response to an assignment, for

instance, to discuss a "significant job experience"--with the emphasis on *significant* --more or less says, "Once I worked as a playground director; it was a very rewarding experience, and I hope to do it again sometime." Period. Such a paper lacks the developing information, the concrete details about the *when*, *where*, and *what* of "once I worked as a playground director" and especially lacks the examples and reasons and assessments that would make "it was a very rewarding experience" persuasive enough so that we would believe that "I hope to do it again sometime."

But teachers of basic writers also routinely get papers in which the writer has become so enmeshed in describing the *where* and *when* that she never moves the topic any further, either simply stopping after a two-page description of, say, the playground itself or of the background circumstances that led to the playground director's job, or else writing the two pages of description and then tacking on a sentence to indicate that the work was rewarding and that she hopes to do more of it. Such a student seems to get derailed, to get stuck on the first segment of the discursive operation and be unable to start moving again. She lacks the sense of horizontal movement, the directional plan, that would not only keep her moving towards her goal but, even more important, show her how to get there.

And here is another point at which Pitkin's work has important implications for teaching beginning writers, for Pitkin points to the means by which discursive movements are effected when he suggests that discourse "*does not occur within the individual base clause; it occurs only when bases are combined*. 'Ben was hungry' is not discourse. 'Ben was hungry, so he fixed himself a sandwich' is discourse." Pitkin asserts that discourse is, then, a hierarchy of binary operations whose "stages are two stages of *a conventional logical relation-*

ship, one of many that enable us to put ideas together."[23]

Pitkin also points to the devices that establish the relationships --make the connections--between discursive units, or blocs:

> Quite regularly the relation between two blocs is signalled by such function units as coordinating conjunctions, sentence modifiers, even at times the main clause of a complex sentence, such as "It follows that X," where it follows is clearly signalling "deduction."[24]

In part, Pitkin is noting the same thing that W. Ross Winterowd suggests in his article "The Grammar of Coherence" when he asserts that transitional devices such as coordinating conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs are the means by which the relationships that establish coherence are effected between or across T-units[25]--except that Pitkin would not distinguish relationships across from those within T-units:

> When we speak of the structure of a given discourse, we are speaking of its stages and substages, junctures and subjunctures, not of its static parts and joints. . . . Discourse is an operation, and . . . its units are units because of what they do, not merely what they look like. Discourse is segmented not merely by spatial joints (periods, semicolons, indentations) but by junctures, by those moments in the meaningful continuum where we can say, "To this point we have been doing X; now we begin to do Y."[26]

Thus discourse may also take place within the T-unit, and the subordinating conjunction becomes an important marker of "coherence."

The larger significance of Pitkin's suggestions is that it is making connections--establishing relationships--between ideas that

constitutes discourse: it is the so in "Joe was hungry, so he made himself a sandwich" that performs the discursive operation. Thus in paying attention to the points of connection, the joints where ideas come together, we are thinking discursively. Further, the discourse operation is the same at every level, a point that Michael Grady has discussed and one whose implications Josephine Miles recognizes when she says, in her discussion of theories of the paragraph:

> The explicit connective terminology of sentences play across and beyond the mere sentence unit. The "when-when-when-then" structure of a Shakespearean sonnet is equally suited to paragraph or whole essay as to single sentence. . . . even the independent predicate-nucleus can be seen to be introduced by capitalized Nevertheless, However, But, Then, Or, On the other hand, Therefore. The indentations of paragraphs may stand for semicolons as well as periods, semi-stops as well as full stops.[27]

Signals of function and relationship--conjunctions and so on--are not only the tools by means of which we perform the binary operations of discourse but manifestations of what Winterowd calls "the most basic properties of language"[28]--and also, probably, of thinking. Diagnostic testers recognize this when they test logic by ascertaining the student's perceptions of appropriate connections.[29] Larson, discussing Frank D'Angelo's work with "a conceptual theory of rhetoric" and specifically D'Angelo's relating of modes of development to ways of thinking, suggests the same relationship between the structures of thought and of discourse: "In connecting the typical patterns of arrangement with procedures for thinking--and eventually with ways of putting together sentences, i.e., with expression--D'Angelo does much

to bring out the unity of rhetorical theory and the dangers of separating arrangement from invention and from style."[30] It seems quite likely that many of the "strategies of discourse" marked by the kinds of connecting and relating devices that Winterowd and Pitkin list are problem-solving operations that determine and organize both structure and content. Winterowd suggests the same thing; listing seven kinds of relationships that can be established between T-units--coordination, obversivity, causativity, conclusivity, alternativity, inclusivity, and sequence--he writes, "If . . . the seven topics isolate the relationships among any segments of discourse (except those related to one another by the grammar of the T-unit), then they might well be the basis for a truly generative rhetoric."[31] Thus the "grammar of discourse" has implications for invention as well as for composing, and the teaching of syntax to these ends can help beginning writers with all stages of the writing process. For, as Lunsford notes, it is precisely the connections between ideas--especially the establishing of causal and purposive relationships--that remedial writers seem unable to supply.[32] By making them conscious of those connections, we make them aware of the ways and directions in which the mind moves when it is thinking about a subject, and students then can self-consciously employ these direction signals to generate ideas about a subject.

Thus far my discussion has been largely theoretical. Let me now turn to some of its practical applications in the writing classroom. To recapitulate my argument thus far, I am suggesting that in teaching our students to write, we are trying to show them how to develop their ideas and to relate them. This implies that in working with language competency, we should, as Pitkin suggests, relate structure to function,[33] should, in helping students learn to write effective sentences, concentrate on teaching them to make connections. Yet first we must often take a prior step; Josephine Miles has pointed to the importance of predication in the English sentence,[34] and since many basic writers have only the fuzziest notion of how an assertion hangs together, we

must initially teach them to predicate their base clauses correctly and effectively so that the relationships between the clause's core elements--between subject-verb-direct object, for example--are clear and logical.

Shaughnessy notes that "writing requires the withholding of utterance in order to perfect it. And 'perfecting' in writing has much to do with the ability to consolidate sentences--that is, to subordinate, syntactically, some elements of an idea or statement to others and to conjoin other elements that are clearly of equal semantic weight." Despite Christensen's strictures upon subordination, it is one of the chief ways by which we establish both hierarchy and relationship within the T-unit, two operations that are essential in academic discourse (probably no one would disagree with Christensen's larger point--that we should discourage the writing of contorted and convoluted sentences). But basic writers cannot handle the numbers of subordinations required by complex utterances unless they have a strong sense of the core sentence. Nor can they, for that matter, write the strong base clauses upon which a cumulative sentence's development hangs without such a firm grasp of fundamental structure.[35]

To give it to them, we can devise exercises that use a combination of sentence-combining techniques and patterned practice to have them write sentences imitating models in the basic sentence (i.e., independent clause) patterns, first in their "core" forms and then in expanded ones that include simple one-word adjective and adverb modifiers and prepositional phrases--the patterns controlled so that students do not "overload" the slots. Sentence-combining exercises calling for such rudimentary embeddings within strong core-sentence patterns could provide useful additional practice.

Probably it is the practice itself--the repeated constructing and transcribing of such correctly predicated sentences--that improves

students' writing, but college students also need to know the principles of correct predication, for, as Shaughnessy notes, basic writers often reach beyond their capabilities in trying to write about the complex material that is the subject matter of college-level discourse; a conscious understanding of how a sentence's key elements work together can enable them to recognize when and how their predications are going awry.

Once students have developed a strong sense of the basic sentence patterns, we can begin to teach them, increment by increment, the ways of joining and relating ideas through the conventional devices of combining, joining, and relating elements, with each new addition building on what has gone before. In working with students at the college level, we need to give them some formal understanding of the operations they are performing. Shaughnessy's examples of student prose document the varied ways in which beginning writers can go astray --for instance, in adjective clauses whose relative pronouns are the objects of prepositions; at times, only an understanding of how the clause is constructed out of its kernals can untangle such syntactical knots. But we can present explanations in the simplest terminology possible and, again, we should emphasize practicing the forms rather than learning about them.

Most important, we should teach these forms as operational strategies rather than as structures whose mastery is an end in itself. That is, almost from the beginning of the writing course, we can encourage students to start making connections in their writing, using whatever devices that they have studied to date, and we can teach the logical and rhetorical functions of the various techniques of joining and relating.

In only a few weeks of the kind of syntactic work I have been des-

cribing, college-level students can have covered these basic techniques, transcribing kernals into verbal phrases, adjective and adverb clauses and phrases, and attaching them to core sentences, joining sentences with coordinating conjunctions, and making transitions with conjunctive adverbs; as each new device is introduced, its logical and rhetorical effect or effects should be emphasized. Once students have covered these "basics," six of the seven transitional relationships that Winterowd lists, supplemented by a few of Pitkin's "strategies," can be used as the nucleus around which to construct a simple chart showing the various kinds of relationships that can be established between units of discourse and the devices that indicate each. That is, most of these relationships can be indicated with either a coordinating conjunction or with one or more subordinating conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs; "obversivity," for example--what Pitkin tags as CONTRAST/CONTRAST--can be signaled by but, yet, although, even though, whereas, nevertheless, on the other hand, and so on. I would exclude "inclusivity" from this particular list because its chief function is a vertical one.

The terminology identifying the strategies needs to be simplified and made consistent for basic writers, and we will have to pay attention to the differing punctuation required by these various ways of joining and relating. But students can learn some fundamental strategies of discourse by doing exercises in which they are given two assertions to join or relate, assertions that require them to think about the implications of the joining devices that they choose:

> Joe enjoys Mary's company. She spends all her free time collecting lizards.
>
> Joe enjoys Mary's company because she spends all her free

time collecting lizards. (Or even though? It makes a difference.)

We can teach students the differing degrees of emphasis--and incidentally, the varying punctuation--involved in joining or relating their assertions with a coordinating conjunction, a subordinating conjunction, or a conjunctive adverb by asking them to do the combining three different ways, each using one kind of joining or relating device.[36] (Again, we should employ simplified terminology: connectors, adverb clause signals, introductory adverbs, for example.) Sentence-combining exercises could provide additional practice and should be designed to lead students into the next step: establishing transitions between sentences in longer passages of discourse. The important thing is that we emphasize again and again, both in the classroom and in our evaluations of individual writing, the importance of connecting ideas, stressing that it is the making of these connections that performs one of the major operations of discourse.

Of course, as Winterowd suggests, not all such relationships must be established explicitly--often they are implicit, and, as Pitkin demonstrates, they may be made in many ways other than the joining or relating of clauses. Base clauses are being linked through a binary operation whether we write, "While Joe was running down the street, he saw Mary," or "While running down the street, Joe saw Mary," or "Running down the street, Joe saw Mary," or even, perhaps, "Running, Joe saw Mary." Students can be taught all these strategies, together with the differing effects that result from employing each, as long as we emphasize the necessity of relating ideas.

Occasionally students will, in the first flush of enthusiasm for a newly acquired skill, overconnect their assertions, but usually

after a few weeks of practice they establish a comfortable middle ground; if not, the instructor can remind them that not every operation requires an explicit signal. However, most basic writers err in the opposite direction, failing to make enough connections in their writing, and they need continual reminders of the importance of "joining" and continuous practice in doing so. But as they work on the grammar of discourse over a period of time, they begin to think in terms of the relationships between ideas so that they start relating assertions without being reminded to do so--and with an increase in the consciousness of relationships comes an increase in cognitive functioning, however we explain its genesis [37]--a point that is implicit in the sentence-combining research. And in working with students' compositional processes, we can use these same syntactical cues as heuristic aids, suggesting, for example, points at which a writer needs an <u>although</u> or a <u>because</u> phrase or clause or a <u>nevertheless</u> or <u>consequently</u> sentence or section to develop his or her ideas adequately.

Teaching the grammar of coherence can help students with the forward movement of their discourse, for in general the signals of transition that Winterowd identifies facilitate horizontal movement. Richard Larson recognizes this when he suggests that "if Professor Winterowd is right, and if he has enumerated fully the kinds of relationships between units, then it might be possible to sketch a linear or directional plan for any piece of discourse by describing the pattern formed by the successive transitional relationships between units in the discourse."[38]

But how do we also help our students with vertical movement? Here, I think, is where Christensen can be invaluable. Once students have learned the basic techniques of modification, some carefully patterned practice in constructing parallel elements can lead them easily into

learning the cumulative sentence--desirable as an end in itself, since uninstructed basic writers almost never use end free-modifiers; by enabling them to do so, we add to their repertoire of writing strategies. Further, writing cumulative sentences whose end modifiers are coordinate gives students valuable practice in handling parallelism, an area in which basic writers often have great difficulty. And such exercises can, as Christensen noted, be "generative," for if we provide our students with the right kinds of models to pattern their sentences after, we will coerce them into constructing chunks of vivid descriptive detail, and so on. I like, for an initial exercise, to write a base clause and then instruct students to develop it several ways, each requiring a different kind of end free-modifier--verbal phrases, noun clusters, absolute constructions, adjective clusters, and so on. In each case, I write the initial free-modifier and require students to write two more to follow it. This careful patterning both prevents their stumbling into some of the grammatical bloopers that basic writers can initially make with these complex structures and commits them to a certain specificity of detail and, if I have done my work well, a certain vigor of style, for I tell them that they must construct modifiers that are at least as explicit and as vivid as those I have written. Not all of them can do so, of course, but what they can and do do is to compose more vivid, energetic, and concrete prose than they have hitherto written, and these gains are carried over into their own composing--particularly if the sentence-development exercises can be supplemented with sentence-combining work to give additional practice.

But we can also use the cumulative sentence to teach students about "levels of generality" in discourse, for once the student is comfortable with the two-level sentence, we can move on to the multi-level variety, using the sentence's segments to teach students how to

move down--or, for that matter, up--the ladder of abstraction, one of the most difficult tasks that basic writers face in learning to do academic writing. Christensen's system of numbering the levels of generality can be enormously helpful, and we can use it to construct exercises that arbitrarily require students to move their sentences down to, say, the "three"level of generality. Students can imitate models and they can also develop a given base clause according to a design: two two-level segments, a three-level, and a four-level, for example. We can move from sentences to longer units of discourse and talk about moving an idea down to a third or fourth or even fifth level of generality.

I am not suggesting that we want our students to write only cumulative sentences and the sort of extended discourse that fits neatly into Christensen's patterns of paragraph analysis but rather that we need a specific technique--a "recipe"--for enabling them to travel up and down the discourse hierarchy. In connection with this recipe, we can suggest the kinds of transitional devices that facilitate these vertical shifts, and here I would mention what Winterowd calls "inclusivity" and Pitkin the INCLUDER/INCLUDED relationship.

Perhaps it goes without saying that we can also use all of these tools to devise what Larson envisages in the statement cited earlier: a discursive statement, the predication of which and the relationship of whose parts give a linear plan for the entire essay, with all the advantages that Larson enumerates for such a scheme. In addition, we have the technique for generating vertical development at the points of the "plan" at which it is needed. What we lack is a diagrammatic representation of such movement that is simple enough to be useful in teaching basic writers. As I have suggested, Pitkin's analyses are, it seems to me, too complicated for this purpose, and we want to

avoid getting students so caught up in such means that they lose sight of the end: the writing of better discourse, not the learning of complicated models of analysis. Christensen's models can also present pitfalls of this sort if we spend too much time, for example, worrying about just how a given passage should be analyzed rather than using the principles as a strategy to generate and facilitate development in spots where it is lacking. What we need is some simple visual representation of how discourse moves both horizontally and vertically, one that will help our student to write. Perhaps it would be possible to combine Christensen's vertical representations with a set of horizontal ones whose shifts would be signaled by the transitional devices.

Yet even without a perfect schematic representation, these two concepts of movement--of relating assertions and of developing them--can be valuable teaching tools: once students understand them, they can consciously employ two of the basic strategies of discourse, and teachers can use these same concepts to identify not only the places where discourse needs relating and developing but to give students some specific means by which to do both. This in itself would make such teaching strategies worth our while. The fact that students are at the same time improving the level of their syntactic maturity suggests that we ought, as Josephine Miles has noted, to take cognizance of how the language works at its most fundamental level in order to teach students how to work with it.[39]

Notes

[1] Mina Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations (New York: Oxford Univ.Press, 1977), p. 5.

[2] Shaughnessy, p. 240.

[3] Janet Emig, "Writing as a Mode of Learning," CCC, 28 (May, 1977), pp. 122-123; Emig draws especially on the work of Lev Vygotsky, A. R. Luria, and Jerome Bruner.

[4] For a similar argument predicated upon somewhat different assumptions, see Thomas J. Farrell, "Literacy, the Basics, and All that Jazz," College English, 38 (January, 1977), pp. 450ff.

[5] This despite numbers of studies that claim to show that learning grammar causes no increase in writing ability. Janice Neulieb argues that these studies are subject to considerable question; see "The Relation of Formal Grammar to Composition," CCC, 28 (October, 1977), pp. 247-250.

[6] As Frank D'Angelo argues; see A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric (Cambridge, Mass: Winthrop, 1975), pp. 56ff; also see pp. 42-54 and passim.

[7] Shaughnessy, pp. 73, 79.

[8] See John C. Mellon, Transformational Sentence-Combining: A Method of Enhancing the Development of Syntactic Fluency in English Composition (Urbana, Ill: NCTE, 1969); Frank O'Hare, Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing without Formal Grammar Instruction (Urbana, Ill; NCTE, 1973); Donald A. Daiker, Andrew Kerek, and Max Morenberg, "Sentence-Combining and Syntactic Maturity in Freshman English," CCC, 29 (Feb, 1978), pp. 36-41.

[9] "Linguistic Theory and Composition," CCC, 29 (May, 1978), p. 136; this is probably a theoretical limitation; I suspect that in the classroom many instructors do pay attention to the effects of various syntactic manipulations. De Beaugrande's point is that these effects have not been identified in any systematic way.

[10] Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg, p. 40.

[11] "What We Know--and Don't Know--About Remedial Writing," CCC, 29 (Feb, 1978), p. 51.

[12] Shaughnessy, p. 240.

[13] Francis Christensen, "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence" and "A Generative Rhetoric of the Paragraph," in The Sentence and the Paragraph (Urbana, Ill: NCTE, 1966), pp. 1-7, 20-32.

[14] Christensen and his wife, now widow, Bonniejean Christensen, have developed an entire rhetoric course around "the Christensen method"; see A New Rhetoric (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). More generally, the concepts of the cumulative sentence and of levels of generality are finding their way into numbers of composition textbooks and workbooks.

[15] Shaughnessy, p. 241.

[16] David H. Karrfalt, from "Symposium on the Paragraph," in The Sentence and the Paragraph, pp. 71-76; also see Sabrina Thorne Johnson, "Some Tentative Strictures on Generative Rhetoric," in Contemporary Rhetoric: A Conceptual Background with Readings, ed. W. Ross Winterowd (New York: Harcourt Brace Jov, 1975), pp. 352-364, for a discussion of some important limitations of Christensen's stylistic assumptions.

[17] Richard Larson, "Toward a Linear Rhetoric of the Essay," CCC,

22 (May, 1971), pp. 141, 146; the cited remark is from Richard Gorrell.

[18] Willis Pitkin, Jr., "Discourse Blocs," CCC, 20 (May, 1969), pp. 141-142; "Hierarchies and the Discourse Hierarchy," College English, 38 (March, 1977), p. 649.

[19] Pitkin, "Hierarchies"; see Pitkin's example, pp. 652-653.

[20] Larson, p. 144.

[21] In "Symposium on the Paragraph," S&P, pp. 69-70.

[22] Larson, p. 146.

[23] "Hierarchies," p. 651.

[24] Pitkin, "Discourse Blocs," p. 142.

[25] W. Ross Winterowd, "The Grammar of Coherence," in Contemporary Rhetoric, pp. 228-229 and 225-233 passim.

[26] Pitkin, "Discourse Blocs," p. 139; also see "X/Y: Some Basic Strategies of Discourse," College English, 38 (March, 1977), pp. 660-672, for Pitkin's analysis of the common binary relationships (and their markers) that characterize discourse; many of his categories are similar to Winterowd's.

[27] Miles, p. 71; also see Michael Grady, "A Conceptual Rhetoric of the Composition," CCC, 22 (Dec, 1971), pp. 348-354.

[28] Winterowd, p. 228.

[29] See, for example, the section on "Using Appropriate Connections," questions 13-25, of the test on "Logical Relationships," College Board Descriptive Tests of Language Skills (Princeton: ETS, 1977), pp. 3-4; Josephine Miles alludes to this same phenomenon:

> Teachers in Subject A, the special pre-college course in written English at Berkeley, have found that the use of a

> few basic connective terms will indicate the student's degree of mastery over the arrangement of his motives," and notes "the powerful relation of grammar to logic and rhetoric."

See "What We Already Know about Composition and What We Need to Know," CCC, 27 (May, 1976), p. 141 and pp. 136-141 passim.

30 Richard Larson, "Structure and Form in Non-Fiction Prose," in Teaching Composition: Ten Bibliographical Essays, ed. Gary Tate (Forth Worth, TX: Texas Christian Univ.Press, 1976), p. 57, epmhasis added; also see D'Angelo, A Conceptual Theory . . . .

31 Winterowd, p. 231.

32 Lundsford writes:

> Some parts of the "aluminum" passage /the sentence-combining passage used for diagnostic testing in the Ohio State study/ called for synthesis and organization by the student rewriter, specifically in the form of establishing causal relationships or attributing purposiveness. As a group, our students were markedly unable to supply such elements. This evidence thus underscored sharply for us the need to work on conceptual and inference-gathering skills (p. 49).

33 "Concentrating on the grammatical form of the sentence (in negative terms as fragment, run-on and comma splice; in neutral terms as simple, compound, complex) ignores what is truly important: just how structure can be used to reinforce the operational hierarchy, how the discourse operation determines--or at least should determine--the structural choices"; "Hierarchies," pp. 653-654.

34 Miles, "What We Already Know . . . ," pp. 137-138.

[35] Shaughnessy, p. 51; Christensen, "The Problem of Defining a Mature Style," in Notes Towards a New Rhetoric: Nine Essays for Teachers, 2nd. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 141 and 134-149 passim.

[36] For example:

> Join or relate the following pair of sentences in three different ways: use a connector, an adverb clause signal, and an introductory adverb:
>
> > Mary spends all her free time collecting lizards. Joe enjoys her company.

The student then writes:

> Mary spends all her free time collecting lizards, yet Joe enjoys her company.
>
> Although Mary spends all her free time collecting lizards, Joe enjoys her company; or, Joe enjoys Mary's company although she spends all her free time collecting lizards.
>
> Mary spends all her free time collecting lizards; nevertheless, Joe enjoys her company.

Or, perhaps:

> Joe enjoys Mary's company, for she spends all her free time collecting lizards.

And so on.

[37] Lunsford, p. 51; Lunsford notes that "as our students' abil-

ity to manipulate syntactic structures improved, so did their ability to draw inferences and make logical connections."

38 Larson, "Towards a Linear Rhetoric . . . ," p. 144, n.7.

39. Miles, "What We Already Know . . . ," p. 137.